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ABSTRACT

Current education reform efforts show a lack of attention to the three out of four students currently in the educational system who are unlikely to ever earn baccalaureate degrees. The Tech Prep Associate Degree Program (TPAD) is aimed at preparing this neglected majority for the demands of a complex and shifting economy and improving teaching and learning. TPAD received funding under the Perkins Applied Technology and Vocational Education Act to: (1) provide planning and demonstration grants to consortia of high schools and community/technical colleges for development of four-year, (Grades 11-12-13-14) Associate Degree or Certificate programs; (2) provide comprehensive curricular links between high schools and community colleges emphasizing occupationally specific programs; and (3) combine knowing with doing in the teaching-learning process. Some 8 years later, the most successful TPAD efforts are exhibiting the following characteristics: the establishment of a cooperative partnership among high school and community college personnel; the regular involvement of employer and labor representatives; high expectations of students as well as applied academics curricula to help students reach these expectations. Early returns from schools that have fully implemented the TPAD program show a definite pattern of improved student learning. Unfortunately, the success of these programs have been nearly ignored in the new national school-to-work emphasis. TPAD should be a key focus of community colleges, as a way to provide a more cost-effective education and as part of a new definition of excellence. TPAD programs benefit students, employers, high schools, community colleges, communities, states, and the nation. (KP)

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February 1, 1994

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The Tech Prep Associate Degree Program Revisited

by

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There are three rather startling observations to be made about the education reform efforts currently going on across the country. First, is the lack of attention being given toward improving the teaching process. Second, is the neglect of that majority of students who will not likely ever earn a college baccalaureate degree. Third, is the sparse participation by community, technical, and junior college personnel in the education reform discussions.

Education reform efforts seem to cluster around a new set of three "R" groupings: reporting or more testing, rivalries or more competition, and restructuring or more site-based management. Although many of these reform programs make important contributions, most have exhibited a blind spot related to the central mission of improving teaching and learning. The fundamental question can be asked with all of these reforms: "What happens when the teacher closes the classroom door? Is anything different in the teaching-learning process?"

In the reporting group the emphasis has been upon achieving accountability through testing even to the point of developing national tests. An attitude seems to prevail of "Let's find out what students know (or *don't* know), and who we can find culpable for their not knowing. Let's develop a set of arbitrary knowledge standards. Do not worry about what students can do, just what they know."

In the restructuring group of reform efforts the primary attention has been given to site-based management, empowerment of teachers, ungraded primary schools, and longer school years. There are many salutary aspects to the ideas surrounding the subject of restructuring education. Restructuring involves several diverse elements. It can involve changing the time-honored Carnegie Unit and granting of credit. However, much of the contemporary discussion about restructuring seems to concentrate upon a process called "Site-Based Decision-Making". This is based upon the important belief that those most closely affected by decisions ought to play a major role in making those decisions. There can be little question that education reform will be more effective when carried out by those responsible for the implementation of that reform. All that is known about total quality management points schools and colleges in that direction.

But, what is distressing is the small amount of attention given to improving teaching and learning in the work of site-based councils.

We might expect and certainly hope that these site-based groups and their important restructuring efforts will sooner (rather than later) give the highest priority to the improvement of teaching and learning. If the restructuring efforts in schools and colleges fail to give the highest priority to the improvement of teaching and learning, we can only wonder if it has been worth the effort.

In the rivalries group the emphasis has been upon words like "choice" or "voucher" symbolizing a desire to create more competition in education. In 1991 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching launched an exhaustive study concluding in a 1992 report titled "School Choice". The study involved a year of research, school visits, interviews with parents, teachers, school administrators and some public polling. From the day the report was issued in October 1992, it attracted enormous media interest, editorial comment, and public attention. The Carnegie researchers found some bright spots like several schools in Minnesota that attracted students by creating innovative programs. But in an overall conclusion, the report said that no "choice" program had demonstrated a clear link between choice and improving student learning.

School choice advocates have embraced the choice idea as the most promising vehicle for education reform insisting that applying free market competition would make good schools better and force weak schools to improve. However, the Carnegie report said that there is an unimpressive relationship between school choice and improvement of student learning. On the central issue of student learning, standardized test data fail to demonstrate that students who transfer from the public schools are doing any better in the school of their choice.

Clearly, school choice is only one small aspect of education reform and, unless managed carefully, risks harm if the benefits of choice cannot be brought to every single student. The issue of choice must fit into the context of improving learning. It is merely a diversionary tactic to present school choice as a panacea that can miraculously sweep away all difficulties that restrict learning and impede good teaching.

<u>The Neglected Majority</u>

Closely related to the problem of improving teaching and learning is the fact that nearly all of the individuals writing the "how-to-fix-it" reports are products of the college prep/baccalaureate degree curricula and programs. These individuals seem to see reform strategies only through their own personal educational experiences. They seem to react as if all of the population looks and acts like them. They ignore the fact that three out of four students in the U.S. education system are unlikely to ever earn a

four year college baccalaureate degree. Yet, most schools and colleges are operated as though the college prep/baccalaureate degree program is the only definition of excellence in education. By this definition, any other approach to education is viewed as second rate.

Disturbed by this limited and limiting definition of educational excellence, I devoted most of 1984 to writing The Neglected Majority[1], defining the neglected majority as that group of students who are unlikely to complete a baccalaureate degree program. This book offered a different perspective on education reform and excellence outlining the Tech Prep Associate Degree Program (TPAD) aimed at preparing "the neglected majority" and other students for the demands of our increasingly complex and shifting economy, and to improve teaching and learning.

This text subsequently initiated what has now become a national discussion and educational policy agenda item. The Tech Prep Associate Degree (TPAD) Program received the bi-partisan support of influential political leaders in Congress such as Congressman William Ford, Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee, and many others, who forcefully advocated that the TPAD concept should become a funded part of the reauthorized federal Perkins Applied Technology and Vocational Education Act.

The major purposes of congressional funding for the TPAD program are to (1) provide planning and demonstration grants to consortia of high schools and community/technical colleges for development of a four year (Grades 11-12-13-14) TPAD program leading to an Associate Degree or Certificate; (2) systematically provide strong and comprehensive curricular links between high schools and community colleges emphasizing continuity between the last two years of high school and occupationally specific associate degree or certificate programs; and (3) combine knowing with doing in the teaching-learning process based upon the goal of improving the teaching and learning process, particularly involving the integration of academic and vocational education.

Now, some eight years later, the TPAD program development is picking up speed and exhibiting the following characteristics in the most successful consortia:

- the establishment of a cooperative colleague partnership among and between high school and community college personnel, particularly faculties,
- the regular involvement of employer and labor representatives in the program development discussions,

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[1]Parnell, Dale The Neglected Majority (1985), Community College Press, American Association of Community Colleges, Washington, D.C.

- high expectations of students as well as the development of applied academics curricula to help students reach these expectations,
- an agreed upon substance-rich curricular structure that provides opportunities for all students to understand the connection between academic and vocational education,
- strategies developed aimed at changing attitudes about technical education and viewing the TPAD program as a program of excellence,
- provision for teacher/counselor in-service staff development programs on the TPAD programs,
- development of community/technical college "bridge" programs aimed at preparing adult students who have missed the high school portion of the TPAD program, and
- the development of performance indicators indicating progress and improvements in student learning.

The states most energetically implementing the Tech Prep Associate Degree program focus unwaveringly on the target: the "neglected majority". The Oregon State Board of Education has stated the focus in this way:

> *It is imperative that education give priority attention to the curricular needs of students who are unlikely to complete a college baccalaureate degree program. We must improve the match between what students need to succeed in work and other life roles and how they are taught. This requires the integration of learning-to-know with learning-to-do, changing how curricula and instructional materials are developed, how content is delivered, and how student learning is assessed.*

Early returns from those schools that have fully implemented the TPAD program indicate some amazing results. Chopticon High School and Charles County Community College in southern Maryland have demonstrated a commitment to success for all students through the Tech Prep Associate Degree program curriculum. One measure of the success of students is through the Maryland School Performance Program indicators of student achievement. A definite pattern of improved student learning is clear.

CHOPTICON HIGH SCHOOL
MARYLAND FUNCTIONAL TEST SCORES

	Reading	Math	Citizenship	Writing
1987-1988	93.2	63.5	59.6	67.9
1988-1989	93.1	64.9	70.2	74.8
1989-1990	97.4	79.3	67.1	83.8
1990-1991	97.4	79.8	82.4	55.5
1991-1992	97.0	78.4	82.1	87.7
1992-1993	97.5*	83.3*	85.4*	96.1*

*Highest score in school history

In addition to improvements in student learning, the student drop-out rate at Chopticon has gone from nearly 30 percent over four years to under 8 percent in the 1992-93 senior class. Other high schools implementing the TPAD program report similar experiences in reducing the high school drop-out rate.

Here is what school superintendent Douglas James of the Richmond County Public Schools in North Carolina has to say about the TPAD program:

> "First I would have to say that the program has had the greatest impact on secondary education in Richmond County since high school consolidation in 1971...Since the beginning of our Tech Prep program, our average SAT score has increased 46 points, the dropout rate declined dramatically, and the percentage of graduates choosing to attend a community college increased from 24 percent to 46 percent."

Much credit must be given to the Clinton Administration in their proposed new School-To-Work Opportunities Act aimed at assisting students in making the transition from school to high skill, high wage careers. However, it has been disappointing to see the success of the Tech Prep program being nearly ignored in this new national school-to-work emphasis. The Tech Prep Associate Degree applied academics program and work-based learning programs must be developed together, rather than being viewed as unconnected separate programs.

Students must be academically and technically ready to enter work-based learning programs, even as they must be ready to enter a university program. If not, employers may become disillusioned and, as a result, their level of support and commitment could begin to diminish. The Tech Prep Associate Degree Program offers the academic, technical, counseling, and motivational components that are so essential to making the school-to-work program be viewed as a program of excellence.

The Community College and the Tech Prep Program

It is estimated that some forty billion dollars is spent annually by U.S. public and private employers for employee education and training programs. This figure does not include costs for training in the military. The Department of Defense estimates that it spends an additional fifty billion dollars per year on education and training. Public and private employers are concluding that more fully developing the competencies and related performance of the work force will be the major factor in determining the future health and productivity of their enterprises.

More and more community colleges are waking to the need to cooperate with high schools in developing curricula appropriate for this new technological world. It is absolutely imperative that community, technical, and junior colleges become aggressive in examining, developing, and sustaining quality educational programs to serve that great host of Americans who keep this country working.

One key to this new educational thrust is the associate degree. Although this educational goal has been around for some eighty-five years, it is not well-known by the general public. The arrival of the new "learning age" and proliferation of technician-level education programs have spurred interest in this two-year degree. They have also led to the establishment of a variety of associate degrees such as the Associate in Computer Science, Associate in Business, and the like.

What is an associate degree worth today? Dramatic statistics released recently by the United States Department of Commerce reveal that the associate degree continues to gain significant ground as an important employment credential. For example, the average monthly earnings difference between the associate-degree holder and the high-school graduate jumped from $300 to $600 per month difference between the years 1984 and 1990. Over the same period, the difference in monthly earnings between associate-degree and vocational-certificate holders doubled--jumping from $198 to $400, while the difference in earnings between associate-degree and bachelor-degree holders remained fairly constant. Probably the most dramatic earnings difference is between *the associate-degree holder and the high-school dropout; this gap has widened from $773 in 1984 to a whopping $1,200 per month in 1990!* We should be shouting this difference in earning power loudly enough for every potential high-school dropout in the country to get the message, yet oddly enough many community college leaders are strangely quiet on this subject.

The associate-degree program is central to the mission of the community, technical, and junior college. The associate degree reflects the larger goals of educational attainment the institution holds for its students. It is a means through which the institution develops and maintains integrity in its educational programs. The associate degree serves as an important student guide and requires commitment on the part of the student for program completion. Yet, few high school students know

much about associate degree requirements.

Emphasis upon the associate degree in a TPAD program indicates to teachers, administrators, students, and society that the TPAD consortium has a vision of what it means to be an educated person and affirms the consortium's commitment to program continuity, coherence, and completion. The associate degree, which is awarded only for completion of a coherent program of study designed for a specific purpose, also indicates that the holder has developed proficiencies sufficient to prepare for upper-division collegiate work or to enter directly into a specific occupation with confidence. It is the hallmark of the educated worker who will be the backbone of tomorrow's work force, and community college leaders must give clear signals about the quality of this degree.

Cost-Effective

The TPAD program is cost effective for the student as well as the taxpayer. Most community college students take longer than two years to complete a two year program. They arrive at the college with such severe academic deficiencies that it is not unusual for a community college student to take an additional year or two of study to compensate for these deficiencies. The student will certainly save time and money if any deficiencies can be made up while still in high school and thereby reduce the extra time required in college.

The taxpayer will not be called upon to support, via tax dollars, an extra one or two years of college for a host of students. Most community college administrators estimate that 1/3 of their enrollment may be found in developmental education. Just think of how the dollars supporting developmental education could be redirected if the remedial education enrollment could be reduced? Community college leaders should be stressing the cost savings, if for no other reason, in supporting the development of the Tech Prep Associate Degree Program.

A New Definition of Excellence

If we are serious about meeting that great range of individual differences in open-door high schools and community colleges, we must cultivate goal-oriented programs of excellence flexible enough to match students' diversity. But educators cannot hope to develop an appropriate educational response unless educational excellence is redefined. We must reject the idea that excellence can be found only in certain university-oriented programs or in preparing for certain professions.

How can educators meet that great range of individual differences among students, whether rich or poor, able or disabled, university-bound or destined for community college, apprenticeship, military, or a specific job including homemaking? We must vigorously challenge the assumption that a college baccalaureate degree is

the sole road to excellence, respect, and dignity. We cannot allow ourselves to confuse social and educational status with equality of opportunity and individual achievement, regardless of the field of study. It will be a sad day indeed if the "excellence movement" in education becomes a cover for a retreat from equity and opportunity concerns. Excellence and elitism are not synonymous terms.

Clearly, American education requires some new definitions of excellence--definitions that will hold meaning for all students. Is imposing a classical-education with baccalaureate-degree goals upon all students the answer to these new challenges? Obviously not. Such a program may indeed motivate some students, but surely it will discourage others--especially the three out of four high-school graduates who are not likely to complete a college baccalaureate-degree program. A key question for education reformers is this: Can all students experience educational excellence, rather than just some of them? The answer is yes--but they need more than high-school "bachelor living", "arts and crafts", and other hobby-type courses, and they also need something other than more unconnected theory courses.

Some fundamental shifts must be made in school and college programs if the needs of all students are to be met and the universal education enterprise is to be moved up the road a few more miles. High schools and community, technical, and junior colleges must be concerned with improving the educational program and performance of all students..rather than just some of them, and community college leaders must lead that parade toward excellence.

Everyone Wins With The Tech Prep Associate Degree Program

- **Students** will develop sound basic skills and knowledge while obtaining an excellent education. They will develop the competence to be able to cope with a fast-changing modern life...and do that with confidence. *Students will be the big winners!*
- **Employers** will win by obtaining a better-educated worker than ever before. And skilled worker shortages will be alleviated as the Tech Prep program becomes widely operational in high schools and community colleges across the country.
- **High schools** will win because more students will stay in school to complete their high-school education, and more students will find satisfaction in their applied academics courses of study. The tone and morale of the high school will improve as more students find themselves engaged in a meaningful and substantial education program.
- **Community colleges** will win because entering students will be better prepared. Colleges will spend less time and money on remedial and developmental education programs.
- **Communities and states** will win because cooperation at different levels of education will eliminate unnecessary program duplication, provide for

greater efficiency, and more fully develop the human resources of each region.

- Finally, **the United States** will certainly win by the development of a world-class workforce that will outwork, outproduce, and outsmart the international competition. The greatest resource in our nation, the human resource, will be more fully developed than ever in our history.

What a Tech Prep/Associate Degree Program Is and Is Not	
The Tech Prep/Associate Degree Program is...	The Tech Prep/Associate Degree Program is NOT...
◦ a cooperative and connected secondary and community college program emphasizing continuity in learning.	◦ unconnected secondary school and community college courses.
◦ an avenue to successful employment with multiple exit points leading to an associate degree and possibly further education.	◦ a high school general education program which prepares the student for nothing!
◦ an avenue to educational reform with emphasis upon teaching and learning that combines knowing with doing.	◦ a traditional approach to teaching but with a new name.
◦ the integration of technical education and academic curricula with an Applied Academics emphasis.	◦ vocational-technical education based on technical skills only.
◦ a curricular "choice" or "major" based upon individual learning styles.	◦ a "tracking" approach to education.
◦ preparation for a career and continuing education.	◦ entry-level job preparation only.
◦ a clear curricular structure with substance and focus.	◦ a smorgasbord of courses without substance and focus.